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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 003194

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [UNSC](#) [VE](#)
SUBJECT: STAFFDEL MEACHAM BREAKFAST WITH DIPLOMATS

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Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT DOWNES,
REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶1. (C) Summary. Visiting Senate Staff Member Carl Meacham, accompanied by Ambassador and DCM, met October 23 with diplomats from Chile, Mexico, the UK, and Canada. The diplomats predicted President Chavez will win the December 3 presidential election, but said Rosales is running a strong campaign. Both the Chilean Ambassador and Mexican Charge' underscored that their countries' relations with the BRV continue to be strained by Chavez' efforts to export his Bolivarian "revolution." The Ambassador and Meacham stressed the need to overcome Venezuelan obstructionism in the ongoing race for a rotational seat at the UN Security Council. The Chilean Ambassador predicted that the Latin American and Caribbean grouping at the UN (GRULAC) would not find a consensus candidate until after Venezuela's December 3 presidential election. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) DCM hosted an October 23 breakfast with third country diplomats for visiting Senate Staff Member Carl Meacham. Chilean Ambassador Claudio Huepe Garcia, Mexican Charge Nicolas Escalante Barrett, Canadian DCM Vicken Koundakjian, UK Second Secretary Matthew Lewis, and Mexican Cultural Attache attended. Chilean Ambassador Huepe and Mexican Charge' discussed Chavez' re-election prospects, their respective countries relations with the BRV, and the ongoing race to fill the final rotational seat on the UN Security Council. Ambassador Brownfield, poloff and USAID officer also participated. Meacham has cleared this cable.

Presidential Election

¶3. (C) Mexican Charge Escalante said he did not expect the December 3 presidential election to alleviate the severe political polarization in Venezuela. He predicted that Chavez' base would turn out in force and re-elect the president. He said opposition candidate Manuel Rosales will have trouble persuading many potential supporters to vote for him rather than abstain. The opposition is understandably concerned that the government's use of digital fingerprinting machines will violate ballot secrecy. Chilean Ambassador Huepe also underscored that many Venezuelans are afraid of voting for Rosales after the BRV's political victimization of persons who signed the 2004 presidential recall referendum petition (and updated blacklists).

¶4. (C) Ambassador Huepe opined that Rosales and his opposition allies are mounting a credible campaign. He called Rosales an "attractive, but not charismatic" alternative to Chavez who has gained some ground with his proposed debit card ("Mi Negra") scheme to redistribute oil income. Huepe also noted that most Venezuelan voters, despite giving the government low marks in many areas, are inclined to "forgive" Chavez because they believe Chavez "represents them." Both Escalante and Huepe said they did not believe Rosales could beat Chavez, even if the upcoming election were free, fair and transparent.

¶5. (C) Noting that Chavez confronts internal disputes within his movement, Huepe and Escalante said they believed Chavez advocates the creation of a single "revolutionary" party to try to contain such divisions. Huepe stressed that the "internal contradictions" of Chavez' administration made it difficult to determine who really controls the government bureaucracy. Escalante said Chavez reportedly does not fully trust Defense Minister Baduel and underlined the potential significance of the "Chavismo without Chavez" faction within government circles. At the same time, the diplomats said President Chavez faces no real checks on his authority.

Regional Relations

¶6. (C) Noting that Venezuela and Mexico have not been represented at the ambassadorial level in over a year, Charge Escalante said he maintains a low profile to avoid exacerbating tensions between the two countries. More specifically, he noted that he is under instructions not to meet privately with opposition groups, while government officials are loathe to meet with him. Escalante said most Mexicans have a strong sense of nationalism and resent perceived BRV efforts to interfere in Mexico. Nevertheless,

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the BRV tried to influence Mexico's most recent presidential election and is still actively supporting some Bolivarian circles in Mexico, according to Escalante.

¶7. (C) Ambassador Huepe cautioned that Chavez is also trying to influence some left-wing parties in Chile, but with only limited success. He criticized Venezuela's most recent ambassador to Santiago as "too political" and mentioned that he met with Venezuela's new ambassador-designate to Chile and expects her to be "more diplomatic." Huepe also revealed that a MVR National Assembly Deputy chided him for hosting a meeting attended by Rosales and some of his close advisors. Huepe said he subsequently clarified the diplomatic nature of the meeting with Vice President Rangel.

UNSC Race

¶8. (C) Huepe reported that he was surprised by the Chilean government's eleventh hour decision to abstain in the race between Venezuela and Guatemala for a two-year rotational UN Security Council seat (over Huepe's recommendation that Chile vote for Venezuela). He added that Bachelet's office called him to obtain cellular phone numbers for Chavez and Foreign Minister Maduro, presumably so Bachelet could convey the Chilean government's decision personally. Huepe predicted that Venezuela would perpetuate the impasse until after the December 3 presidential election, and until then, the Latin American and Caribbean group at the UN (GRULAC) would not be able to tap a consensus candidate.

¶9. (C) Visiting Senate staff member Meacham urged Chile to show more leadership in securing a GRULAC consensus candidate for the UNSC seat sooner. Ambassador Brownfield stressed that Latin American and Caribbean countries have few options

left after 35 rounds of UN voting. He said the impasse could continue for two-plus years, or GRULAC could try to make do with only one representative on the Security Council, or, more logically, GRULAC could select a consensus candidate. The Ambassador urged that GRULAC not allow Venezuela to tie the UNSC race to its own presidential election calendar.

BROWNFIELD